

*On a Man's Writing'*

and projects to which my feelings impelled me ; but the feelings themselves, in their own pure juvenility, cannot be revived so as to be described and placed in comparison with those of later life. What is become of all those vernal fancies which had so much power to touch the heart ? What a number of sentiments have lived and revelled in the soul that are now irrevocably gone ! They died like the singing birds of that time, which sing no more. The life we then had now seems almost as if it could not have been our own. We are like a man returning, after the absence of many years, to visit the embowered cottage where he passed the morning of his life, and finding only a relic of its ruins.

Thus an oblivious shade is spread over that early tract of our time, where some of the acquired propensities which remain in force to this hour may have had their origin, in a manner of which we had then no thought or consciousness. When we met with the incident, or heard the conversation, or saw the spectacle, or felt the emotion, which were the first causes or occasions of some of the chief permanent tendencies of future life, how little could we think that long afterwards we might be curiously and in vain desirous to investigate those tendencies back to their origin.

In some occasional states of the mind, we can look back much more clearly, and much further, than at other times. I would advise to seize those short intervals of illumination which sometimes occur without our knowing the cause, and in which the genuine aspect of some remote event, or long-forgotten image, is recovered with extreme distinctness in spontaneous glimpses of thought, such as no effort could have commanded; as the sombre features and minute objects of a distant ridge of hills become strikingly visible in the strong gleams of light which transiently fall on them. An instance of this kind occurred to me but a few hours since, while reading what had no perceptible connection with a circumstance of my early youth, which probably I have not recollected for many years, and which was of no unusual interest at the time it happened. That circumstance came suddenly to my mind with a "clearness of representation which I was not able to retain to the end of an hour, and which I could not at this instant renew by the strongest effort. I seemed almost to see the walls and windows of a particular room, with four or five persons in it, who were so perfectly restored to my